ADVERTISEMENT

PICKED UP BOAT
Perfect except for the name - Princess of the Waves. I know people were sniggering.

FOUND A DELIGHTFUL LITTLE PUB
Twenty six quest ales, By number four I was already feeling seasick.

A SPOT OF FISHING
Found a perfect little hideaway where the fish were practically jumping out of the water. Caught a trout, Then remembered I'd promised to send a postcard to mum.

THE COTTAGE WAS BREATHTAKING
The kids disappeared exploring for an hour or two. It gave us time to just watch the sunset and reflect. Who says romance is all about spending loads of money?

ENJOYED A CRACKING BARBECUE
Can't remember the last time The whole family sat down and had a meal together. They didn't even seem to mind missing Teenage Pop Stars' Noise Academy (or whatever it is).

WENT FOR A QUICK LEG-STRETCH
Seemed like I'd been walking for ages. I worked out when I got back that I must have been doing about three blisters an hour.

SWAPPED BOATS FOR CANOES
Everyone really enjoyed it. I think we may have some Red Indian blood in the family.

HIRED BIKES AND HEADED OFF
They say you never forget how to ride a bike. Nor, it seems do you forget how to end up lying in a field because you thought you'd show off.

RETURNED THE BOAT BEGRUDGINGLY
I'm already planning our next adventure. Must remember to check the name of the boat before we book next time.

THE HOTEL HAD LIVE MUSIC
I haven't stayed up all night listening to bands since I was ..err.. for a very long time.

0 MILES ½

take time to discover the
waterscape.com
your guide to enjoying the water

AUTUMN/WINTER 2003 ISSUE 7

waterfront

Liverpool
then and now

Wellbeing by Water
healthy waterside visits

This is my Patch
taking a whistle-stop tour of the River Trent

British Waterways

Frontlines

A word from the editor

My recent trip to Venice – the city of canals – was certainly an eye opener. With over 150 canals, 409 bridges and not a road in sight, the only way to get around is on foot or by boat. In fact, according to our gondolier, every building has a door leading onto the canal so large objects, like furniture, can be moved around. The canals really do buzz day and night with non-stop activity, tourists mingling with locals as they jostle for a piece of the waterways. These animated Venetian canals are really quite different from our more tranquil, peaceful waterways.

And what a great time the autumn is to make the most of our relaxing waterways. In our feature on 'Wellbeing by Water' we've road tested four different healthy waterside visits including a bike ride, a run and a walk. Alongside this our photomontage 'The Gallery' illustrates just how appealing the waterways can be in the autumn – an ideal time to take the camera out and capture their splendour.

The summer has been all change for BW with a restructure and on pages 22 to 23 we report on this. If you have anything to say on the restructure or anything else regarding BW then you'll be interested in our 'Just Ask' article with BW's customer relations manager, Eugene Baston on pages 10 to 11.

Looking ahead to my next city trip I'm starting to think of places nearer to home. Venice may be the world's 'city of canals', but our very own Birmingham actually has more miles of canal. There is plenty to do, so I believe it's well worth a visit, and if I'm stuck for activities I'm sure I can fit in some walking, running and cycling along the way!

Nicky Ross
Editor

Boat licence holders will receive the following inserts in *Waterfront:*

- BW waterway unit boundaries map
- Waterways World leaflet
- Boat Saftey Scheme, 'Avoiding Fire Afloat'
- RYA, 'Keep it Relaxed'
- The Waterways Trust, 'Help restore the Cotswold Canals'

Autumn/Winter 2003 Issue 7

CONTENTS

Regulars

2 **Up Front**
News in Brief

6 **A Day in the Life of a Visitor Mooring**
Stoke Bruerne

8 **This is my Patch**
The River Trent

10 **Just Ask... Complaints, Compliments and Customer Relations**
We put the questions you're asking to the right people

20 **Then and Now**
Liverpool

26 **Shortcuts**
Meet the people you'll meet on the bank

28 **Letters Page**
Have your say

Features

12 **Focus on Fussing**
Meet the WOW events co-ordinator

14 **The Gallery**
Autumn waterway scenes

16 **British Marine Federation**
Who are they and what do they do?

18 **Waterscape.com**
We take a look at the new waterways website

22 **Winds of Change**
We look at why BW has restructured

24 **Wellbeing by Water**
Healthy waterside visits

waterfront

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Marsworth Locks, Grand Union Canal

The pulp used in the manufacture of this paper is from renewable timber produced on a fully sustainable basis.

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This paper is suitable for recycling.

Up Front News in Brief

CANAL SUPERSTAR

One of TV's most notorious love-rats, Eastenders' 'Dirty Den', has made a surprise return to the square. Viewers had believed for years that he had come to a watery end when he was apparently shot dead on a canal towpath. An exciting twist in the Dirty Den saga sees him reunited with his on-screen daughter Sharon, after her tearful visit to the canalside spot where she presumed he had been killed. Den's return to our screens was aired on 29 September. The episode would not have been possible had it not been for the hard work of BW waterway operatives Gary Nicholls and Mick Jones, and waterway supervisor Graham Smith on the Grand Union Canal, in London. They spent one of the hottest days of the year, back in July, with the Eastenders film crew using their work boat to provide the best filming location for the canalside scenes. With the episode attracting nearly 17 million viewers their work was most definitely appreciated, and as always all fees from filming will be reinvested into the waterways.

DEFINITIVE DIMENSIONS – GET YOUR DRAFT COPY NOW!

At last – what every boater has been crying out for! BW, with the help of Richard Booth of the Historic Narrow Boat Owners Club, has recently published a final draft list of all minimum dimensions on its 2,000-mile network. The exact dimensions of BW's waterways have long given cause for many a heated debate, but hopefully now, after a lengthy process to identify all the pinch points on the network, the debating can come to an end.

The document details the minimum air draught on each waterway or stretch of waterway, and the maximum boat draught, beam and length that can readily navigate it.

BW wants to ensure that the information is as accurate as possible before the document is printed. You're invited to view the draft version of the Craft Dimensions document at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/consultations or you can contact the Customer Service Centre for a copy on 01923 201120. Anyone wishing to make any comments on the draft figures should send them to Stewart Sim, BW operations director, at the Watford address by 7 November 2003.

FREIGHT RETURNS

On 16 July this year, the Grand Union Canal's first major freight contract for over 30 years was launched by Transport Minister David Jamieson MP. Set to remove the equivalent of 45,000 lorry journeys from the roads between Denham & West Drayton over the next seven years, the contract will see the transportation of 450,000 tonnes of sand and gravel by canal.

The contract was signed between BW London, Harleyford Aggregates and Hanson Aggregates, and was made possible with grants from the Department of Transport and London's Waterway Partnership that have paid for the necessary work on the canal infrastructure, along with vessels and equipment to make the scheme viable.

COTSWOLD CANALS BID FOR FUNDING

Having secured sufficient match funding in June a bid has now been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant towards the first phase of the restoration of the Cotswold Canals. Bids have also been made to the South West Regional Development Agency for significant contributions to the regeneration of the canal and its corridor. Expected to cost £40 million and to take up to five years, this major phase of the project will restore the 7-mile Stroudwater Navigation, from Saul Junction, close to Gloucester, to Stroud, and a further 3 miles of the Thames & Severn Canal from Stroud to Brimscombe Port. There is widespread support in the region for this ambitious project, which will bring enormous benefits to local communities, businesses and wildlife, while conserving an important part of our heritage.

WORD OF WARNING ON LONG-TERM MOORINGS

Long-term moorings are not transferable with the sale of a boat, warns BW. Therefore looking for a mooring or putting your name onto a waiting list is advisable before purchasing.

The long-term mooring terms and conditions form part of your mooring agreement and state: 'the mooring agreement is personal to you and you may not assign it to any person. You may allow another person to use the mooring for short periods but only with our permission which shall not be unreasonably withheld'.

BW AND THE HIGHWAYS AGENCY

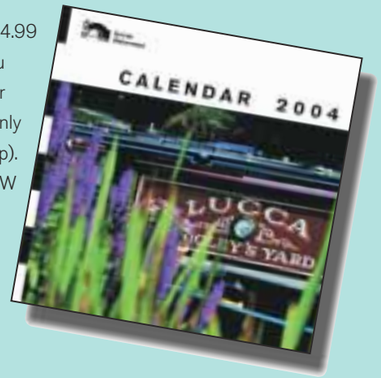
On 14 July 2003, BW and the Highways Agency signed a memorandum of agreement which will ensure the two agencies work effectively together towards the closer integration of the road and waterway networks. The agreement should help to achieve a closer working relationship that will promote operational, heritage and environmental benefits, create more opportunities to transfer freight between land and water, helping to ease road traffic congestion, and aid the promotion of waterway towpaths as an alternative to roads for walking and cycling along. The agreement was signed at the construction site of the new A41 bypass at Aston Clinton, in Hertfordshire, which will not only ease traffic congestion but has also resulted in the restoration of part of the Grand Union Canal's Wendover Arm – a perfect example of the kind of benefits this agreement will bring.

CALENDAR OFFER

Why not start your Christmas shopping early with this *Waterfront* reader offer? The BW calendar will make a great gift for waterway lovers, or a stocking filler for those who will simply enjoy the waterside scenes.

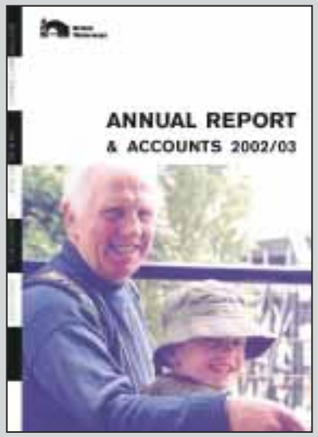
The calendar includes stunning images from across the network that reflect the beauty and variety of the waterways. The images provide a year-round window on the waterways, ranging from the spectacular architecture of The Falkirk Wheel to the natural beauty of the canalside environment on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal.

The calendar retails at £4.99 (+ £1.00 p&p), but if you quote "*Waterfront* reader offer" the calendar will only cost £3.99 (+ £1.00 p&p). To order a copy of the BW Calendar 2004, contact the BW Customer Service Centre: Tel. 01923 201120



OBE FOR STEWART SIM

Stewart Sim, BW's technical director, has been awarded the Order of the British Empire for services to canals in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for 2003.



ANNUAL REPORT PUBLISHED

BW's Annual Report & Accounts 2002/03 was launched on 10 July this year at its most successful Annual Meeting to date, with an attendance of almost 200 guests. The accounts revealed that BW's total income stood at £191.6 million, of which a record £81.7 million was generated through commercial ventures. The great news for boaters is that the outstanding backlog of safety-related maintenance was brought down by 61% to £15.5 million this year, and it will now be eliminated completely even earlier than planned, by April 2004.

BW RECEIVES ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

BW has received two government-backed awards that recognise and promote environmental excellence in the design and construction of civil engineering projects. A team led by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) has developed CEEQUAL – the Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment and Award Scheme.

The two projects that received awards are the rebuilding of Osberton Top Turnover Bridge on the Chesterfield Canal in Nottinghamshire and the stabilisation of Polesworth Embankment, a 1,210m-long and up to 4m-high embankment, on the Coventry Canal. Both projects were judged against CEEQUAL criteria assessing the engineering project and its impact on the wider environment. Professor Adrian Long, president of the Institution, presented the inaugural awards at the Scheme's public launch in September.

POLICE PROTECTION

The Thames Valley Police Specialist Search and Recovery Team (SSART) work alongside BW people when they come across anything fishy. Firearms, vehicles, stolen property and very occasionally bodies can be dumped into canals and rivers potentially hindering the enjoyment of visitors. "SSART work alongside BW staff in the Thames Valley area to search for and remove anything criminally-related," explains Andy Clark from SSART. "To the boating fraternity and anyone else enjoying the canals, we'd just like to say that we keep the waterways and the safety of those who use them very close to heart."

THINK...

BEFORE YOU DRINK...

Important news for boaters who like a drop of the 'hard stuff' whilst cruising. The Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 now makes it an offence to be under the influence of alcohol whilst in charge of a vessel used in navigation. The limits are the same as those for driving a car. The Act now allows for the breathalysing of boaters when cruising.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE

Over the summer months a large number of boaters found that their licence and mooring applications were taking much longer than usual to be processed. This was as a result of the introduction of a new computer system. "Whilst trying to do something positive with craft licensing we've inadvertently let some of our customers down," says Robin Evans, BW's chief executive.

"Despite months of testing our new computer system with licence and mooring applications, when it came to 'going live' things were slightly different. As soon as we realised we were having difficulties we got our IT experts onto things, but it's very technical and has taken time. A large number of licence and mooring applications have taken much longer than usual, and we offer a huge apology for the inconvenience this must have caused many boaters. As a gesture of goodwill we will take £10 off the cost of next year's licence for people who were affected by the difficulties."

And are things better now? "Things are much better now," says Robin. "We have got to grips with the new system and will make it work for us rather than against us. Looking ahead we feel confident that applications will be processed quickly and are pleased that our information is now held on a modern and up-to-date system."

BW states that 'people with a 12-month licence expiring between 30 April and 31July 2004, who purchased their current licence after 15 March 2003, will qualify for a £10 discount off their next licence'. Details of how people will receive the discount will be published by BW nearer to the renewal time.

WATERWAYS MINISTER WOWS GLOUCESTER

In July Waterways Minister Rt Hon Alun Michael MP (pictured left) made a special journey to the west country to visit to the Gloucester on Water Festival. The Minister was particularly interested in the WOW (Wild over Waterways) part of the event – Water Racket! More than 120 children from local schools and community groups attended art and music workshops in the two weeks leading up to the event in which they created the dazzling colourful banners fluttering around the site. The young orchestra 'junk music' indulged the Minister in a performance, which ended in him joining in!

WHEELWIND ROMANCE

Falkirk residents Shona Rennie and her fiancé Allan Lindsay decided to push the boat out for their wedding nuptials in April this year and hit upon the idea of a full white wedding on the world's first rotating boat lift. The couple exchanged vows as The Falkirk Wheel lowered their boat from the Union Canal to the Forth & Clyde 115-feet below.

Setting off from Linlithgow in the 45ft-long St Magdalene, the happy couple and their wedding party enjoyed a one and a half hour cruise along the Union Canal before arriving at The Falkirk Wheel to tie the knot.

waterfront READER OFFER

Schroders London International Boat Show 2004

HALF-PRICE ADMISSION AFTER 1pm **

Valid weekdays only (excluding Press and Preveiw day)

This voucher entitles the bearer (plus one other) a reduced admission price of £6 per person* for the Schroders London International Boat Show 2004, in association with The Daily Telegraph, when you arrive after 1pm.

The show is from 8th and 18th January 2004** at ExCeL in London's Docklands and will include a spectacular inland waterways feature with a life-size marina bordered by wild gardens and a waterside pub.

Please read information below for the days that the voucher is valid. For more information on the show visit: www.schroderslondonboatshow.com or www.waterscape.com or Tel: 0115 912 9111 (24hrs)

*Usually tickets are £12 on the door or £10.50 in advance. **This voucher entitles two adults only to the discounted admission price of £6 each on the door after 1pm on 9th January 2004 and between 12th-16th January 2004 only and is only redeemable at the Schroders London International Boat Show 2004, in association with The Daily Telegraph. The show is open until 7pm with late night openings until 9.30pm on the 9th and 15th January. This voucher cannot be exchanged for cash.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VISITOR MOORING

The visitor moorings at Stoke Bruerne are amongst the busiest short-term moorings in the country. They see a wide variety of visitors from seasoned boaters travelling the network through to families taking their first hireboat holiday.

The moorings are located at the southern end of the Blisworth Tunnel on the Grand Union Canal, next to The Canal Museum – a very lively location for visitors. In August, during the hottest week on record, *Waterfront's* Gill Owen and Zoë Hughes spent a day at Stoke Bruerne to meet some of the people who were using them.

ROBIN'S NEST

Our first visitor of the day is Robin West, who's on holiday with Fiona and Lisa, from Milton Keynes. We catch up with Robin whilst he's mooring his boat. He explains that he's on his soon to be in-laws' boat, 'Enigma', and this is the first day of their week-long holiday.

What is your planned journey?
"My aim for the week is to get through Blisworth Tunnel alive! Beyond that challenge I don't know what our plans of a route are," says Robin.

Have you had any amusing moments yet?
"We're not yet 24 hours into the holiday, but only three minutes after we started the boat up we thought we had no power, only to learn that we still had it in neutral!" laughs Robin. "I used to own a boat myself – I had a cruiser and it was nothing like this. Narrowboats have more character and more space, but I find the cruisers a lot more nimble."

THE GATEHOUSE FAMILY

We catch up with Mr & Mrs Gatehouse, with their two children Daniel and Matthew, who hail from Studley in Warwickshire, just before they have their lunch. They're on a boating holiday, on the narrowboat 'Driftweed', which has been hired at Weedon.

Why did you stop here today and where are you heading?
"We stopped here for lunch, on our way back to Weedon. We made it as far as Cowroast, with stops at Cosgrove, Bulbourne and Soulbury locks," says Mr Gatehouse. "The weirdest thing about this holiday is that we are spending three days travelling home!"

"It's a definite thumbs up for boating from the boys"

Have you been on a boat before?
"Not as a family. My father used to own a boat about 20 years ago, and I'm keen to buy one for us. We've got a decision to make though – we have to decide between moving to a new house, emigrating to Canada or buying a narrowboat for our spare time!" explains Mr Gatehouse. "We're testing the boat before deciding whether or not to purchase one of our own."

So what's your choice then boys?
It's a definite thumbs up for boating from the boys.

What has been the best part of the holiday?
"The wildlife. We've seen all sorts of wildlife, from kingfishers to mink and herons," Mrs Gatehouse reveals. "And the kids have really enjoyed the holiday, especially helping out with the locks."

We next ambush Alan & Helen Walker, just as they arrive at Stoke Bruerne. Whilst Alan is busy mooring up we speak to Helen.

What is your route?
"We started at our mooring in Whelton Fields on the Grand Union Canal Leicester Line, went down the Oxford Canal, onto the Thames, and now we are on our way back. All in all, the route should take two weeks to complete," explains Helen.

Do you own this boat – it looks pretty new?
"Yes, we've owned 'Cassiopeia' for two years from new, but we've been boating for years. We started out as a family, boating with our daughters on hireboats and now they use this boat too."

Have you seen anything unusual on this trip?
"We saw a woman at Hanwell who had only just bought her narrowboat that day and had never seen a lock before! Someone had to go and rescue her and we gave her a bit of advice about going through the lock. The best advice we could give anyone is to keep away from the cill, as that's how you can break your boat," warns Helen.

What has been your favourite part of the trip so far?
"I would have to say the Oxford Canal, which was the nicest and prettiest part. Also, Alan much prefers the narrower canals – they're quieter and he likes the narrow locks, although the double locks are much more sociable."

THE WALKERS

FAMILY OF FIVE

Finally we meet the Gatrill family, from Aylesbury, as they are enjoying the sun. The family consists of mum Debbie, dad Adrian, elder son Christopher, younger son Benjamin and daughter Rebecca.

Can you tell me a bit about your trip?
"We have hired the boat from a company in Linslade for ten days and are on our return journey from Coventry. Coventry was great as you could ferry your way right into the city centre and park your boat," explains Debbie.

What's been your favourite bit so far?
"The kids were thrilled to see the boat had a telly, but we all decided to put a ban on it whilst on holiday. It's been great without it, much more relaxing. We've been playing family board games, and the kids have been getting into books," says Debbie. "Rebecca has finished a Harry Potter book and we've had to buy the next one and Benjamin has read The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. It's definitely a good holiday for bookworms."

Will you now consider buying a boat for the family?
"Yes, we have thought about it, this is about the fourth time we've been out on a boat as a family. We used to own a pull-up tent for camping, but didn't really get on with it.

"Boating is much more private, as you have your own space to escape to"

Boating is much more private, as you have your own space to escape to. We have been told you need to take it out about four times a year to get value for money, and i'm sure along with friends and family we'll easily manage that."

So are you recommending boating holidays?
"Yes, definitely – there's such a lot to see," enthuses Debbie. "We all love being on the water in the countryside, going past all the farms and seeing all the wildlife, and Adrian really enjoys the heritage and architecture aspect of the canals."

Hazelford Island

"THIS IS MY PATCH" – THE RIVER TRENT

Since Roman times the River Trent has been used as an important navigation for its nearby inhabitants. The source of the Trent is in the Staffordshire Hills near Stoke-on-Trent. The river becomes navigable at Shardlow and ends where the Trent joins the Humber Estuary.

Left to right: Mark Owen, Stephanie Peacock and Julian Rasen

For BW foreman Mark Owen and tug boat operator Julian Rasen, the Trent is 'their patch'. Between them they have an amazing 48 years' experience of working on the river. In August this year I went to meet them at Newark to get my whistle-stop tour of just some of the delights this 95-mile long river has to offer. Joining us was media and public relations officer, Stephanie Peacock.

ATTACKS BY THE DANES AND ANGLO-SAXONS...

As I start my adventure Julian and Mark tell me that the stretch of river they work on is around 60 miles long and depending on the time of year they can work with a team of up to 15 bank staff and 20 lock keepers. Their base at Newark is just a few hundred metres from Town Lock and is overlooked by Newark Castle. It's no coincidence that the river and castle are so close to each other – the inside of a bend on a river is a good defensive position. The Trent once needed strong defences as both Danes and Anglo-Saxons used to sail up the river to attack England!

ISLANDS IN THE STREAM

The first stop on our journey is at Hazleford Lock and Island. Mark recommends Hazleford, as he explains "It's my favourite place and is really good for boaters. You can only get to the island if you are a boater so it's very peaceful. We've set up a picnic area and permanent barbecue which has proved very popular." The island is an important wildlife site, home to wildflowers, rabbits and foxes. The backwater of the lock provides an ideal location for fish spawning. Julian says, "It's a place to get away from it all. The plants are left to grow wild with footpaths running through the island. There are several visitor moorings here so it's a good place to stop for a few hours or even overnight."

"It's a place to get away from it all. The plants are left to grow wild with footpaths running through the island"

LARGER THAN LIFE LOCKS!

All the locks on the Trent are key operated, apart from the tidal Cromwell Lock, and in comparison to locks on the narrow canals they are huge. Several boats are able to pass through in one locking. Julian explains to me why a river, such as the Trent, needs locks. "The Trent has always been used for freight so it's essential that there is a reasonable amount of water for the passage of boats. Using locks makes sure each section is kept at the right level." Further upstream, at Hoveringham, is a spot that non-boaters are making use of too, especially families as there is a children's farmyard nearby.

Our next stop is Gunthorpe Lock, one of the prettiest sections of the river. "In summer this lock gets very busy," says Mark. "There are plenty of pubs and cafes nearby to get something to eat or drink. This is also a busy fishing area which means there are always people about.

"The site has recently become home to new interpretation boards, which help explain the history of the area. Visitors can also listen to BW tug boat operator Chris Chapman on a new 'audio post' as he recalls stories from his 41 years of working on the river.

TRANSPORTATION

The transportation of goods has always been an important part of life on the river. "The river is still used for freight," explains Julian, "especially because of the links with the Humber on the tidal section. You often see gravel transported along the river which then goes on to be used in the construction industry. During my 24 years on the Trent I have seen a decline in freight, however that has been made up for by the increase in the number of pleasure cruisers. In the future, though, I'm sure freight will continue to play its part."

A BATTY HOME

After leaving Gunthorpe we head for Stoke Lock, an important environmental site. BW manages the woodland in the area which is home to woodpeckers, butterflies and bats. The bats have been given a helping hand, as Mark points out, "several bat boxes have been put up in the woods around Stoke Lock to enable them to roost." This also proves to be a popular spot for visitors to moor and Julian shows me the new floating pontoon, which now provides even more moorings along the wooded path.

Cruising past Newark Castle

WATERSPORTS

After the peace and quiet of Stoke Lock we move on towards Nottingham. On our way we stop off at Holme Lock, home to the National Watersports Centre. Here you can swap your cruiser or narrowboat for canoeing, water skiing, power boating or rafting.

LAST STOP: NOTTINGHAM

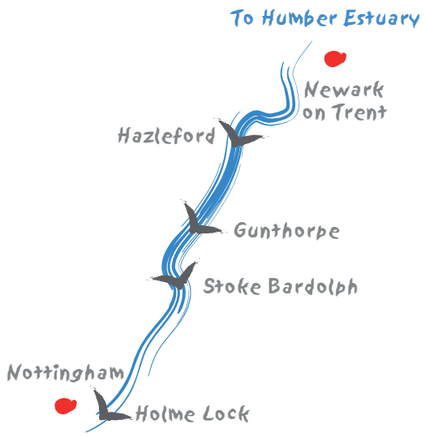
Our last stop for the day, Nottingham, which has a wealth of places to visit. Many of the old warehouses and buildings alongside the river have been converted into bars, restaurants and office space whilst keeping many of their original features. One bar even has an opening onto the river and a narrowboat moored inside it!

BACK TO NEWARK

Departing Nottingham we return to Newark, is well worth a visit itself. "A good time to visit is in early June," says Mark. "The Newark on Water Festival takes place at this time every year. There are live performances as well as water events including dragon boat racing. At other times you can wander along the riverside, admire the castle or walk up to the town centre and visit one of its many markets." The Trent can offer visitors a bit of everything, from relaxing riverside walks to bustling towns and tidal challenges for the more experienced boater.

As Julian and Mark tell me, "It's a good place to work and well worth a visit, whether you have a boat or not."

"After the peace and quiet of Stoke Lock we move towards Nottingham"



For more information about the River Trent please contact the BW East Midlands waterway unit on 01636 704481.

JUST ASK...

Complaints, Compliments and Customer Relations

As in most organisations, BW has its fair share of customer enquiries, complaints and even some compliments. "Just Ask" spoke to the new customer relations manager, Eugene Baston, to find out the best way for us to share our views with BW.

Before joining BW, Eugene walked to work each morning along a towpath, and once took a dayboat out on his local Grand Union Canal. Little did he know that one day he'd be working for the company that was responsible for the waterways.

Now, after five years with BW, he's become extremely passionate about the waterways, something he feels makes his job a lot easier. Beginning with BW as a regional press officer covering events and stories on the Kennet & Avon Canal, the Oxford Canal and the southern section of the Grand Union Canal, Eugene quickly came to appreciate the attraction of water and leisure to the British public. After cutting his teeth on these waterways he then went on to work nationally, carrying on his press officer duties and also being responsible for producing a number of BW videos. When he was recently appointed to the role of customer relations manager he felt honoured to be described in a magazine as a 'waterways enthusiast'.

Eugene, you're the new customer relations manager, tell us what that means?

My job is to build trust and understanding between BW and its many visitors, to understand the issues that arise when ten million people choose to use a small strip of water and land and to propose solutions to the conflicts that can arise from time to time. I'm a bit of a diplomat I suppose! I'm always listening to concerns and queries from individuals and the groups who represent them about BW's intentions, future direction and work in maintaining the waterways.

Another area of my job is dealing with customer and visitor complaints, and believe me, with a network as diverse as ours, the range and nature of these complaints never ceases to amaze me. I've even had to deal with a complaint about the noise of Bongo drums on the towpath!

"I've even had to deal with a complaint about the noise of Bongo drums on the towpath!"

How would I go about contacting you or BW?

There are many ways to contact BW. The main point of contact for questions in general about BW or the network is the Customer Service Centre. If your question is of a local nature then you might find it better to speak to your local office.

And what do I do if I want to make a complaint?

I actively encourage people to make a complaint if they're not happy with something. I see this as an important way to improve on the visitor's/customer's experience. If you have a complaint about your local waterway, call or write to the waterway unit, addressing it to the general manager. If your complaint is about BW's service in general then you should write to me, Eugene Baston, at the Watford address.

What is BW doing to improve its complaints procedure?

While serving us well in the past, our current complaints procedure does not reflect the customer expectations of how complaints should be dealt with in the leisure industry today.

We launched a consultation in July this year on 'Openness & Accountability', containing proposals to make it easier to make a complaint and receive a suitable resolution.

The consultation deals with complaints, the Waterways Ombudsman scheme and the general principles of dialogue and consultation. It's extremely important to BW that these processes are understood, and are fair and transparent if we are to achieve the levels of growth in visitor satisfaction that we've set ourselves.

"While serving us well in the past, our current procedure does not reflect the customer expectations of how complaints should be dealt with in the leisure industry today"

How do we find out more about the 'Openness & Accountability' consultation?

If you want to see details and documents connected with any BW consultation, they can be viewed on the BW website at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/consultations or you can get a hard copy by contacting our Customer Service Centre.

The consultation closes on 17 October 2003, unfortunately before *Waterfront* readers will see this. I'm expecting many responses to these important proposals that have been sent to all BW user groups, along with canal societies, canal trusts and local authorities. This really will define the way BW is held to account over the next few years.

We expect to publish the consultation findings and our proposed route forward just before Christmas. If, from this document, there are no major objections to our intentions, then it is green light and go towards implementing these processes.

You mentioned the Waterways Ombudsman – what role does he play?

The Waterways Ombudsman is a very important part of ensuring that BW's decisions and actions can be independently scrutinised should a dispute arise. If a customer feels that their complaint has been unsatisfactorily dealt with by BW staff, they can take their case to the Ombudsman, who is independent and unbiased, for consideration.

The Ombudsman considers cases on the basis of 'maladministration' by BW, but I feel that this term is largely misunderstood. It can mean many more things than simply improper filing or paperwork! Again, part of the 'Openness & Accountability' consultation contains proposals to improve the general understanding of the Ombudsman's remit and terms of reference.

The current Ombudsman is due to retire in early 2004. However, until then, his contact details are: Stephen Edell, The Waterway Ombudsman, PO Box 406, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5GF Tel/Fax: 01273 832624 Email: waterwaysombudsman@talk21.com

Do you also receive compliments?

Yes, we do. It's commonly accepted that people are much more ready to complain than compliment an organisation and its staff on the services they've experienced, so they're not as frequent as the complaints. However, we do receive a pleasing number of comments from happy visitors who feel that our people have gone the extra mile to make something happen. Of course, compliments are great for maintaining morale and encouraging even higher standards of service, and it makes working for BW even more pleasant than usual when a nice letter drops on my desk.

"It's commonly accepted that people are much more ready to complain than compliment an organisation and its staff"

And finally Eugene, who do you work with?

Both within and outside BW I work with a very diverse range of people, mainly as a result of the very diverse nature of BW's business.

Whilst my colleagues are able to offer specialist advice in areas such as the environment, heritage, law and of course an invaluable knowledge of their local waterways, the interests and concerns of people outside BW are just as diverse. Of course, the issues of navigation and boating are regularly at the fore, and there are many different aspects just within this particular area. Add to this questions about walking, angling, cycling and visitor facilities and it's never a predictable day!

On a day-to-day basis I work with Amanda Strang, our customer relations administrator, who has been with BW since she left school over six years ago. Amanda's a boater who is also very passionate about working for BW and between us we make quite a team!

BW contact details can be found on the inside front cover of this magazine.

FOCUS ON FUSSING

the wow events co-ordinator

Kirsten (far right) alongside John Craven at this year's National Waterways Festival

When Kirsten Fussing is around, expect fireworks! That's not because she's a particularly volatile person – far from it in fact – it's because she is a trained pyrotechnician, a unique skill she brings to BW's events for children and young people.

Kirsten is the event co-ordinator for WOW (Wild Over Waterways), the partnership initiative between BW, The Waterways Trust and the Inland Waterways Association to enthuse, inspire and involve children in inland waterways.

Along with an interactive website, which offers games, activities and educational tools for children and teachers, WOW runs activities for young people at all the major gatherings in the waterways calendar and has its own programme of events specifically designed to appeal to a new generation of waterway enthusiasts.

GLOUCESTER ON WATER

In July, children at the Gloucester on Water festival at the city's docks were mesmerised as WOW's Giant Junk Guzzler – a 20ft floating fish created from old washing machine parts and oil drums and powered by solar energy – performed a graceful routine outside historic Llanthony Warehouse. Spouting plumes of coloured smoke and jets of water, the Guzzler was undoubtedly one of the stars of the day.

"Children really loved it," Kirsten agrees. "Part of my role is to create child-centred events with a waterway focus to interest and attract young people. Something like the Guzzler has a really strong appeal."

A further strand to her work is to seek the funding that will enable WOW to continue to create new and innovative events on the waterways.

Kirsten currently works on about six major events during each summer season and she also helps IWA branches and BW offices across the country to provide volunteer-led WOW activities for children at their own festivals. She explains, "I've written a resource pack, which is a kind of blueprint on how to deliver a children's event. It gives advice on areas such as working with volunteers, child protection issues and involving arts professionals, and it also covers the activities and games devised by WOW."

Kirsten (left) with Waterways Minister Rt Hon Alun Michael MP (right)

WALK THE PLANK

Kirsten has been in her current post for around a year and half now, having previously worked with an events and performance group called Walk The Plank which owns and operates Britain's only theatre ship 'Fitzcarraldo'.

"It's a former Norwegian car ferry with the back hold converted into a theatre seating about 120 people," she explains. "It travels round the coast of Britain and over to Ireland with shows and in the winter moors up at Salford Quays on the Manchester Ship Canal."

Kirsten herself was involved with Walk the Plank's second area of expertise – organising massive outdoor events including celebratory firework shows and open air spectaculars. The year 2000 was particularly busy with Walk The Plank planning and executing the midnight firework festivals in major cities including Manchester, Newcastle, Belfast and Liverpool.

"It was exhausting," Kirsten agrees, "but really good fun too. In fact last New Year is the first one I've spent at home for about six years and I really missed the buzz."

WOW's Giant Junk Guzzler

As a trained fireworks expert, Kirsten was responsible for putting the bang into the Millennium celebrations enjoyed by thousands of people in the North West. So how did she come to be involved in such an unusual field?

"I first met Walk the Plank back in 1997 when I was working as the administrator for an internet company," she explains. "At the time I lived in Hulme near Manchester, which was the focus of an important regeneration project. The success of the project was celebrated with a huge community festival and Walk The Plank was co-ordinating it. I volunteered to help out and things just developed from there."

Fireworks became her speciality. "I learned the job from Walk the Plank's gaffers, who have at least 15 years of experience behind them. It can be dangerous, but you learn to work safely – you have to!"

With so many of WOW's events and festivals requiring an explosive and colourful focus, Kirsten's unique skill is often called upon. Even the plumes of coloured smoke spouted by the Giant Junk Guzzler are carefully planned and managed.

MILLENNIUM FIREWORKS

Kirsten's first dip into the world of waterways came when the company was involved with a spectacular water pageant to mark the Millennium in Manchester. A water-borne carnival travelled the canals of the area created from a fleet of narrowboats disguised as range of fantastic figures including a fire-breathing dragon, a ghostly galleon and a school of pink dolphins. Kirsten managed the whole project, from workshops with local school children to designing and rigging the fireworks and towing the fleet of narrowboats up the Ashton Canal.

In addition, her life outside work took on a distinctly nautical flavour when she helped sail a Norwegian herring steam drifter round the coast of Britain from Hull to Liverpool. "It's a beautiful boat, it was built in 1908 so it's nearly 100 years old," she says.

"That's really how I ended up being interested in the waterways," she continues. "Ideally, one day I'd like to live on a pair of narrowboats – as long as I can get my motorbike on board and have more spare time to ride it!"

In the summer season, with so many events happening in quick succession, there's little time for Kirsten to catch up with friends and family – including her mum who lives in Denmark and runs a goat farm.

WOW!

"Yes, I suppose we are all quite individual," Kirsten laughs. "I never had any real career plan in mind so in some ways this has all just happened to me. It wasn't until my job with WOW that I found out what it was that I wanted to do – and it's this!"

"Everything has come together. I love canals, I love working with young people and I love events. There's such a dramatic difference to every day. One minute I could be crawling around inside the Guzzler fitting a battery, the next I could be driving off to a canalside somewhere to start planning an event.

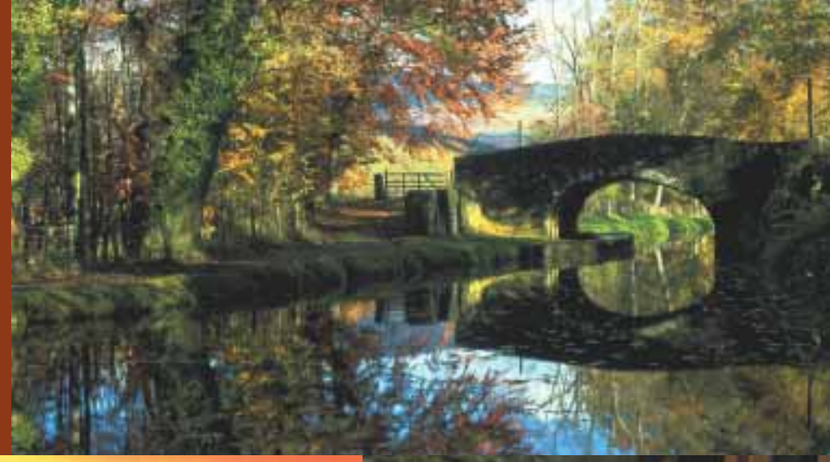
"I work with a fantastic team and it's been really satisfying to see how things have grown and developed. WOW is bringing waterways alive to a new generation – and that's vital to the future of our canals."

Visit www.wow4water.net to find out more about WOW's activities.

"She helped sail a Norwegian herring steam drifter round the coast of Britain from Hull to Liverpool"

the Gallery

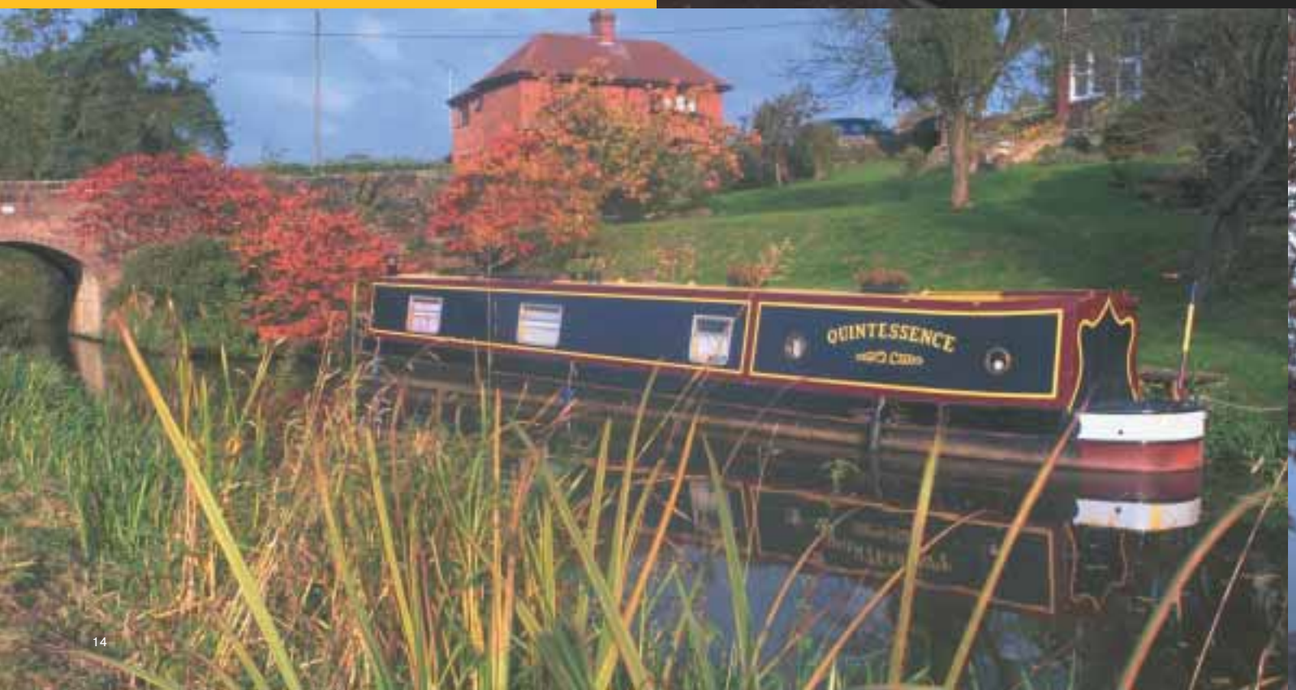
Autumn waterway scenes

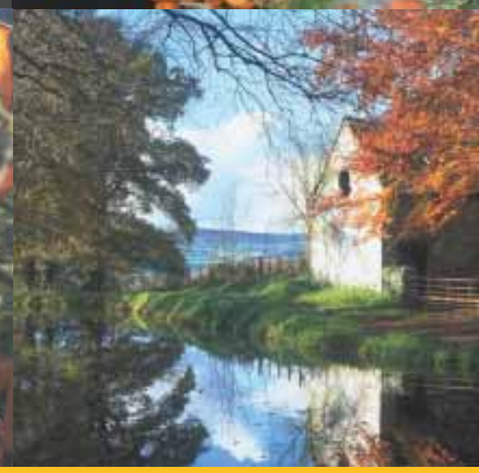


"I shall desire and I shall find
The best of my desires;
The autumn road, the mellow wind
That soothes the darkening shires,
And laughter, and inn-fires.

White mist about the black hedgerows,
The slumbering Midland plain,
The silence where the clover grows,
And the dead leaves in the lane,
Certainly, these remain."

Rupert Brooke, (1887-1915)





This poem is featured in LTC Rolt's classic book 'Narrow Boat' which was first published in 1944 and is said to have started the revival of interest in the English waterways.

BRITISH MARINE FEDERATION

The British Marine Federation (BMF) is the trade association for the British boating industry. Formed exactly 90 years ago as the 'Boat and Yacht Builders' and Proprietors and Allied Trades Protection Association', the association for makers of small craft has totted up a total of seven name changes since its formation.

In 1916 it became the 'Boat, Yacht and Allied Trades Association', only to be renamed again in 1918 as the 'Ship and Boat Builders' Association Ltd'. Following a few more name changes it became the British Marine Federation (BMF) in 2001.

Zoë Hughes spoke to the Director of Marketing for the British Marine Federation and National Boat Shows, James Gower to find out a bit more about what they do.

"BMF has around 1,500 members and we represent the trade element of both inland and coastal waters. Members come from industries that deal in leisure boating, hire fleets, commercial workboats and even superyachts," James tells me. "These members account for 90 per cent of the industry's £1,743 million turnover and employ a staggering 30,000 people.

"Within the membership there are a number of group associations for inland waterways including the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO) and Canal Boatbuilders Association (CBA)," says James.

MEMBER BENEFITS

So what does BMF offer its members? "BMF offers its members a range of services to help build their businesses," James explains. "These services range from advice and financial support on exporting through to information on technical, legal, commercial or environmental matters.

"We also offer training courses and grants plus career and job advice," James continues. "On top of that we actively lobby central government to ensure that any new legislation will benefit the industry.

MAKE AN EXHIBITION OF YOURSELF!

BMF owns and operates the Schroders London International Boat Show and the Southampton Boat Show, which are both in association with The Daily Telegraph.

"Our shows are organised by the Federation's subsidiary, National Boat Shows Ltd," James explains. "We also organise the annual Marine Trade Show at Windsor which brings together over 2,000 individuals from the marine equipment sector."

"BMF offers its members a range of services to help build their businesses"

"BMF has commissioned a brand new 18-part television series which will be aired on Channel 4 this autumn"

These prestigious international consumer events offer showcases for the marine industry and between them attract over 300,000 visitors each year.

"The shows give our members a chance to exhibit to a much wider audience," says James. "Our members are offered discounted rates for trade space, which not only helps them but also helps us reach the public with important messages about career development and participation in all types of boating."

RADIO AND TELEVISION STARS

Because one of its main jobs is to promote inland and coastal waterways it is not surprising that BMF has its own online radio programme. 'Making Waves' relays the latest news from the marine industry including regular updates, interviews with sailing and boating celebrities and sports people, plus key boating tips for the discerning mariner. As well as being available online it is transmitted over the airwaves with over 30 radio stations around the country broadcasting the show.

BMF will soon have its own television series. In partnership with BW and the Environment Agency, BMF has commissioned a brand new 18-part television series which will be aired on Channel 4 this autumn. The programmes will promote the pleasures of the British marine leisure industry, including the inland waterways.

Comprising 18 short programmes, all between five and 14 minutes long, the series will focus on people whose lives revolve around their passion for Britain's inland waterways, including canals, rivers, lakes and The Broads. The series promises to provide a unique insight into life on the water as well as promoting waterways.

A variety of people from many different backgrounds have agreed to share their remarkable stories with the cameras, including the Mikron Theatre Company – a group of travelling players who spend their summers touring the canal network performing plays every night. The series will also feature the fascinating tale of Cliff Jones who gave up a 30-year career on the buses to follow his dream of living on a narrowboat. From the more sedate lifestyle of a wildlife photographer, to the adrenaline packed stunts of Shaun Baker, the world's foremost extreme kayaker, the programmes will cover a whole range of individuals.

"It is a key part of our marketing strategy to support the marine industry both by getting people into boating and increasing the awareness of Britain's waterways," explains James. "Through the Channel 4 programmes and the radio shows we hope that many more people will realise the beauty and possibilities that Britain's waterways and coastal regions offer."

INTERESTED IN MEMBERSHIP?

If you are interested in membership or want to discuss the benefits you can contact the Membership Department by email at membership@britishmarine.co.uk or call BMF on 01784 473377. Alternatively, you can write to them at the address below. Subscription to BMF is calculated based on the applicant company's annual turnover. There are several bands ranging from the minimum £0-£30k turnover, which is currently £105 (plus VAT) per annum, to over £20m, which is £4,215 (plus VAT) per annum.

If you would like to know more about BMF please contact:
British Marine Federation
Marine House
Thorpe Lea Road
Egham, Surrey TW20 8BF
Tel: 01784 473377
www.britishmarine.co.uk

"BMF owns and operates both the Schroders London International Boat Show and the Southampton Boat Show"

waterscape.com

TESTING THE WATER

If, like millions of other people all over the country, GMTV is your choice of breakfast time television viewing, then you can't have failed to notice that, until the end of September, GMTV weather was '…sponsored by Waterscape.com – your guide to fun by the water'.

With an intriguingly watery name, and an encouraging promise, I felt it my duty to find out a bit more. Donning my detective's hat, I went on a mission to discover Waterscape.com. Tap 'waterscape.com' into the navigation bar when you're on the internet and your screen will fill up with a whole host of waterway-related information including guides, events, last-minute holidays and competitions. Thoroughly enjoyable stuff, and just as the strapline says, 'waterscape means enjoy'.

Launched on 27 June 2003, Waterscape.com is the UK's first comprehensive online leisure guide to all of the country's inland waterways. According to its background information 'It was set up to broaden the appeal of Britain's canals and rivers, establishing them as one of the UK's top travel and leisure destinations'. Still in detective mode, I started to delve a little deeper and see what this site, for all its promises, really has to offer.

Firstly, it has to be said, the website's homepage seems clear and easy to navigate and I feel its appeal will be to a broad audience as it offers information on walking, cycling, days-out and cottage rentals as well as the more obvious waterside activities like boating.

WATERWAYS GUIDE

The 'waterways guide' link looked like it might be interesting, so I decided to look at this first. By clicking through from the homepage I was taken into a new area of the site which prompted me to pick a place by name, by region, by postcode, or simply by clicking on its position on the UK map graphic.

So what can this site tell me about an area that I can't find elsewhere? A map is provided for each location along with an introduction to the waterway, relevant news items, a detailed history, walking and cycling guides (including information about the towpath itself), and a nature and wildlife section. The 'places to visit' section of each guide is particularly useful, giving contact details and information about a variety of visitor attractions within easy reach of the waterway, plus booking information and suitability for different visitors. The really useful thing about this site is that all the information is in one place, and you're only one click away from finding out about another destination. I don't think there is another website that competes on this level to give such comprehensive information on all inland waterways.

ROUTEFINDERS

That's all very good for general location and waterway information but what about more detailed facts like route planning? Well it just so happens waterscape.com features a route planner and, for more hi-tech boaters, the trip report can even be exported to a GPS (Global Positioning System) device.

I clicked on 'plan your visit' from the homepage and asked for information on a cruising route from Watford to Northampton. I was asked to enter more specific information so I plumped for Bridge 167, Cassiobury Park (near Watford) to Bridge 2, Gayton Bridge (near Rothersthorpe). I was promptly shown a map of my route, told that it would take approximately 4.8 days, including lock operating time, and that there would be a total of 65 locks en-route. I was able to extract even more detail with a further click, including a list of every lock and bridge on my journey – very impressive. In fact the site doesn't just offer this facility for boats, it also has journey planners for walkers and cyclists too.

"I looked for a cottage near Loch Ness for four people for a three-night stay in the first week of November and was offered a choice of 30 cottages"

WATERSIDE COTTAGE RENTALS AND SOME GREAT DEALS

The website also has holiday deals and it's not just boating breaks that can be booked. A huge selection of cottages in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and even France can be booked via the site. The price and availability table is easy to use, the photographs of the cottage interiors are large enough to give you a really good feel for the place, there's a detailed list of facilities available in and around each property and a selection of comments from previous visitors. I looked for a cottage near Loch Ness for four people for a three-night stay in the first week of November and was offered a choice of 30 cottages. I found a suitable one near Invermoriston. A reasonable £215 secures a three-night stay, and by quoting 'Water1' I could possibly be entitled to an additional 20% off by booking through waterscape.com.

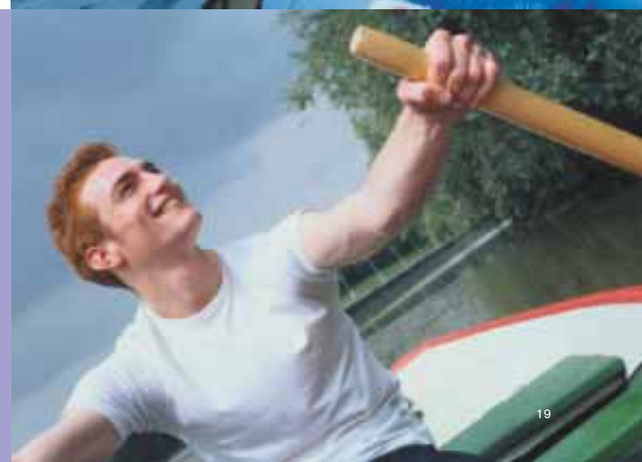
ADD TO FAVOURITES!

With my initial investigation complete, I feel confident that I now have a one-stop site to go to that will satisfy my waterside leisure needs. However, I must add that my research won't be ending here. I may have to make a few more visits to waterscape.com, which could quite possibly involve a certain cottage in a certain location near Loch Ness…

COMING SOON… FEATURES FOR BOATERS

I've been reliably informed that the website is constantly being updated and new information is being added all the time. This autumn/winter a host of new features will be launched especially for boaters, including:

- Information on stoppages and restrictions to navigation on all waterways
- Applying for and renewing existing licences on-line
- A comprehensive guide to visitor and long-term moorings on BW and Environment Agency waterways and The Broads
- Listings of boatyards, marinas and chandleries in the Services Directory
- An 'Eating and Drinking' section, listing top pubs and restaurants alongside the waterways



THEN AND NOW

LIVERPOOL

Lady Luck has been shining down on the City of Liverpool of late. The city has recently been awarded the prestigious title of European Capital of Culture 2008 as well as gaining a new, upbeat reputation following fashion magazine Tatler's renaming of the city as 'Livercool'.

All black and white photos are courtesy of The National Museums, Liverpool

Liverpool is famous for a wealth of reasons including the Beatles, the largest Anglican cathedral in Britain, the oldest Chinese population in Europe, delicacies such as 'scouse' and 'connie-onnie sarnies', two world class football teams and the first successful passenger carrying railway in the world. However, perhaps one of the most enduring images of Liverpool is its waterfront, the place where international trade brought people from all corners of the world to and from Britain.

THE LIFE-BLOOD OF LIVERPOOL

In fact water is the life-blood of Liverpool, bringing fortune, culture and colour to the city. The decline of this maritime industry led to the inevitable economic stagnation of the communities that relied on the prosperity of the port, and this in turn led to a downturn of the area as a whole. But now, following years of decline which badly tainted the image of Liverpool, massive regeneration projects have been put in place to turn around the fortunes of the city, including momentous plans for the Leeds & Liverpool Canal.

THE STRONGEST LINK

The Leeds & Liverpool Canal is the longest canal in Britain. It stretches from east to west across the country, covering a distance of 127¼ miles along its main line. The canal links the Irish seaport of Liverpool with the North Sea, via the Aire & Calder Navigation at Leeds. The idea for a canal which linked the two coasts was originally conceived in a pub in Bradford by a group of established Yorkshire businessmen who recognised the growing colonial markets of Africa and America could be accessed via the port of Liverpool. Soon two committees, Yorkshire and Lancashire, were formed, and in 1770 an Act of Parliament was passed 'for making and maintaining a navigable cut or canal from Leeds Bridge in the County of York, to the North Lady's Walk in the County Palatine of Lancaster and from thence to the River Mersey'.

Building of the canal began, but it wasn't until 46 years later, and at a cost of £1 million, that the whole length of the canal was opened and trade between the two cities could begin. By this time Liverpool had established itself as a truly international port.

Although the canal was not completely linked between Leeds and Liverpool until 1816, Liverpool was linked as far as Newburgh in 1774, and then in 1780 the canal was opened from Liverpool to Wigan. This was an important link for the moving of coal in the region and in the same year a passenger service was introduced. In 1814 a suburban service linking Aintree and the centre of Liverpool was developed, and in 1846 the Stanley Dock Branch was opened. This meant that there was now a direct link into the docks system and goods could be directly transferred from canal boats to ocean going ships.

AND THEN THE WEAKEST LINK

The fate of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal was similar to that of most other canals. Trade declined as new and quicker forms of transport replaced the canal boats, and soon the canal was in little commercial use. By 1964 the coal carrying service to the Athol Street Gasworks in Liverpool ceased and 1972 saw the last coal run to Westwood Power Station, Wigan. Liverpool as a city faced extreme problems and challenges through the 1970s, 80s and early 90s but now things are on the up and the canal is set to play an important role.

REGENERATION

The people of Liverpool have already proved they are up to the challenge of regenerating waterside environments. The Eldonian Village Housing Project has been acclaimed as a model for sustainable communities all over Britain. This project saw a group of residents refuse to give up their dream to rebuild their community, from a place that was a decaying industrial canalside area to an attractive, safe and vibrant environment. With this sort of spirit and desire to succeed, the future of the city is certainly looking brighter.

CAPITAL OF CULTURE

In the Capital of Culture contest Liverpool fought off competition from 11 other cities to win the title. Just one of the changes that are planned following this win is a new look for the waterfront area. The famous skyline consists of the Three Graces; the Royal Liver Building, the Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building. These famous buildings will be joined by a modernistic 'Fourth Grace', called 'The Cloud', which has been designed by architect Will Alsop. The major change for the waterfront is the proposed canal link that will connect the end of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal from its current terminus at Stanley Dock, down through the northern docks, with a 700-metre cut across the Pier Head and into the southern dock system. Construction will include four new locks, five new bridges and one tunnel. The new canal would help to create a vibrant waterfront connecting all the docks, attracting more boats, providing animation and vitality for the water and giving a major boost to the Albert Dock and the proposed King's Waterfront developments. With the link in place boats will be able to sail into Liverpool city centre from the rest of the inland waterway network, adding even more to this city of culture.

To find out more about the proposed link visit www.liverpoolcanallink.co.uk

LIVERPOOL
the world in one city

WINDS OF CHANGE

How would you describe British Waterways? What business would you say it was in? What measures would you put in place now to make sure it was here for the future? In other words put yourself in the shoes of a 'Sir John Harvey-Jones' type and gaze into your crystal-ball … well that's exactly what the management team at BW did, and out of this some fairly sweeping changes are now taking place.

STEP BACK IN TIME

Turn the clocks back to the mid-twentieth century – you've inherited 2,000 miles of waterway. Excellent news… except that on closer inspection you realise their sole purpose is the transportation of goods, and due to the railroads and motorways this has all but disappeared. You try to resurrect their freight role, but can never really compete against these faster operators. To use a little management terminology think 'outside the box', what other useful purposes can this 200-year-old, 2,000-mile network have?

WATERSIDE LEISURE

By the time BW was formed in 1962 the enthusiasm for boating in particular was growing and it wasn't that unusual to see boats cruising along the waterways for pleasure. Leap forward to 2003, and more and more people are not just using the waterway channels themselves for leisure, they are using the towpaths alongside them for relaxing, walking, jogging, cycling and angling. With a need to be more self-sufficient in the future BW has realised that the leisure industry is the way forward. The legacy of canals, rivers and towpaths it has inherited has proved to be an ideal location for visitors, and this is where BW sees its future lying.

"By the time BW was formed in 1962 the enthusiasm for boating in particular was growing"

CHANGES AFOOT

To make this happen BW needs to concentrate more on serving its customers. To help it achieve this aim changes to its organisational structure were put in place this summer.

In May, chief executive Robin Evans announced that ten new waterway units would replace the six regions and 25 waterways that have been in place since 1989.

"We need to adapt to our changing funding environment and it's critical that we become more self-reliant by growing our own income," explains Robin Evans. "Our old structure served us well, but is now not capable of meeting the new challenges we face, as we strive to become a more customer and leisure focused business."

NATIONAL TREASURE

Transforming our national heritage into a viable business, as opposed to a public burden, is something that Robin has accomplished throughout his career. Robin previously worked for the National Trust and the Landmark Trust, as well as running places like Hampton Court. In these organisations he helped to turn underused national treasures into viable leisure destinations whilst keeping true to their history and traditions. It's this model that Robin would like to use at BW.

"Our vision is that the waterways will become both a valued and valuable national asset"

"If you ask people what they consider to be our great national assets, they will say things like the Crown Jewels, the palaces, the coastline, and so on," explains Robin. "Well our vision is that the waterways will become both a valued and valuable national asset and used by many more people." Robin agrees that BW is already part of the way there, but feels that there are many more people who could make use of our wonderful waterway network and that is what the change is all about.

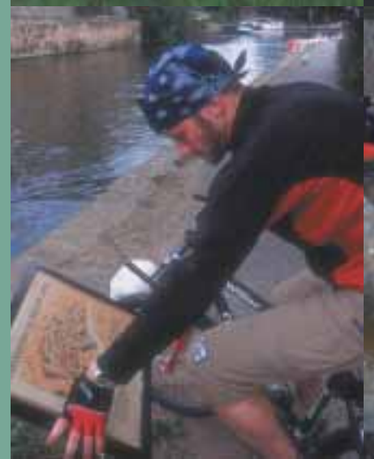
NEW STRUCTURE FOR BW

BW's new structure can be summarised as follows:

- Instead of six regions and 25 waterways, there are now ten waterway units, including London and Scotland. Each unit has a main office, and manages a number of waterways.
- Four units report into southern waterways and four into northern waterways. Both northern and southern waterways have a managing director, who reports directly to chief executive Robin Evans. London and Scotland remain largely unchanged, each having a director, who also reports to Robin.
- Each waterway unit has an appointed general manager who has a senior team that includes a service manager, operations manager, estate manager and finance manager. Each of these managers has a team to support local needs.
- There is now a small central technical team that comprises particular specialists. The majority of people who were formerly working as part of the central waterway conservation and regeneration and technical services teams are now located in the waterway units.

FACES AND PLACES

BW's new waterway unit boundaries are clearly illustrated on the enclosed map. If you are not a boat licence holder the map will not be in your copy of *Waterfront.* If you would like a copy please contact BW's Customer Service Centre, which will send it to you free of charge (Tel: 01923 201120 or email enquiries.hq@britishwaterways.co.uk). Office addresses can be found on BW's website www.britishwaterways.co.uk/addresses.

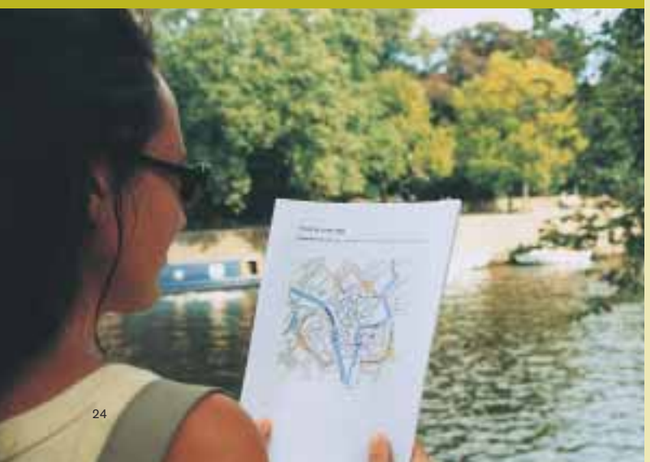


WELLBEING BY WATER

Originally built for horses to pull laden narrowboats and barges, today our historic towpaths provide a freely available leisure environment for many people. With maps in hand the ***Waterfront*** team decided to test the towpaths with a few hearty routines of their own.

Location: York, River Ouse and Foss Navigation
Activity: Walking
Distance: 2 miles
Time: 2 hours (including stops)
Verdict: The essential ingredients for a good walk, I believe, are plenty of interesting sights, a fairly flat surface, a number of resting points, and last, but not least, a large helping of water.

Luckily when I went to York to test the recipe I wasn't disappointed and could see why the Romans, Saxons and Vikings had all claimed it as their own. My walk starts at the esplanade car park, Leeman Road, on the south side of the Ouse next to York station. Heading east along the River Ouse reveals a pleasant mix of regenerated buildings forming plenty of pubs and eateries. Upon reaching the Foss Navigation, where I followed the towpath northwards, I felt a little disappointed. The waterway had clearly seen better days and the crowds had all but disappeared. I promptly left the Foss, cutting further northwards through the 13th century Clifford's Tower, where I was pleasantly surprised to catch a glimpse of the Foss again looking much more attractive. To conclude my circular walk I headed westwards along Piccadilly and through the quaint city centre. My walk ended in Museum Gardens. I enjoyed a well earned rest taking in views of the River Ouse with the spectacular ruins of St Mary's Abbey as a backdrop whilst eating a picnic purchased from a shop on route – the perfect ingredient to end my walk along the riversides of York.



Location: Leeds & Liverpool Canal, Rufford Branch
Activity: Jogging
Distance: 4½ miles
Time: 40 minutes
Verdict: If like me you prefer your run to be on mostly level ground, with plenty to see whilst you pound the tarmac, then towpath running is a revelation. With boats passing by, some interesting architecture along the way and an abundance of wildlife, the miles can clock up quite easily.

"Locks and bridges not only add interest to the run but also a small challenge with the ground rising at each structure"

I chose a circular route combining the main line of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal with the Rufford Branch, and some quiet country lanes of West Lancashire. Starting at the Ring O'Bells pub in Lathom, I headed away from the canal towards Hoscar station, turning left onto Meadows Lane. The countryside in this area is generally flat, fertile farmland and the lane passes several farms and farm buildings. At Prescott Bridge I turned onto the Rufford Branch where the towpath is grassy and easy to run on. The number of locks and bridges not only add interest to the run but also a small challenge with the ground rising at each structure. I reached the main line of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal at the Top Locks. The whole area was originally a canal settlement, with a cluster of pretty terraced lock cottages. Here I discovered the pub The Ship Inn, an ideal stop-off point. For BW key holders there are also showers and the usual boater facilities located here, but for the more energetic the route continues.

I completed my run by heading back to the main canal, where I turned left, passing several moored boats. The towpath crosses Glovers Swing Bridge and continues back towards the Ring O'Bells bridge. Getting back to where I started, I certainly was a little out of breath, but felt a lot healthier and, strangely enough, more relaxed for it!

Location: Tring Reservoir
Activity: Family outing
Distance: 0.9 miles
Time: 1 hour
Verdict: Take the average 21-month old toddler – combine a fascination for ducks and dogs with a love of being in the open air, and a walk beside Tring Reservoirs sounds like the perfect way to spend a bright Sunday morning in August.

"Whilst going out for a walk all too often involves trying to tackle stiles, gates and steps, most of the footpaths around the reservoirs are wide and smooth"

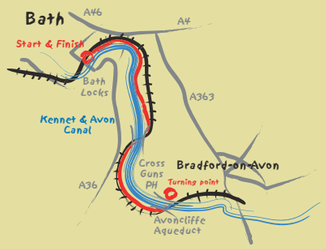
Tring Reservoirs are situated just to the north of Tring, in Hertfordshire. Parking costs just one pound per day in the car park right opposite the 'Angler's Retreat' pub in Startop's End, Marsworth. A useful, if slightly dated looking, notice board details three different walks, depending on how far you want to go. Whilst going out for a walk all too often involves trying to tackle stiles, gates and steps, most of the footpaths around the reservoirs are wide and smooth, so negotiating the area with a pushchair is not a problem. There's even a picnic table. So far so good, then. A word of advice…if you have a small baby who will happily sit in a pushchair for hours on end whilst you walk, then Tring Reservoirs are the ideal destination. If, like our daughter, the prospect of spending more than 15 minutes strapped into a buggy is your child's idea of hell then steer well clear! We eventually completed a circuit of Startop's End Reservoir, and then we carried a screaming, writhing Daisy back to the car. We'd have no hesitation in going back, even with a pushchair… as long as it was empty!

Location: Kennet & Avon Canal
Activity: Cycling
Distance: 13½ miles
Time: 3 hours (including stops)
Verdict: Canal towpaths are great for cyclists as they offer tranquillity away from the traffic and bustle of the urban environment. The Kennet & Avon Canal in particular is a cyclist's dream. Not only is it beautiful, but it's also almost totally flat – ideal for the gentle rider like me! It is also forms part of the traffic-free Sustrans National Cycle Network, which offers some great biking routes for cyclists of all abilities.

"The Kennet & Avon Canal in particular is a cyclist's dream. Not only is it beautiful, but it's also almost totally flat"

My journey started at the Sydney Gardens Tunnel, where I found a nearby road to park my car. My first destination was Dundas Aqueduct, as I knew there was a handy bench where I could take a breather after my first four miles. The first part of my journey was a breeze, as was the second bit, which took me to my turning point: Avoncliffe Aqueduct. With the first leg of our journey complete we stopped, explored and grabbed a drink at Cross Guns public house – which I'd say is one of the most attractive pubs on the canal with its low ceilings, stone walls and flagged floors.

Our journey back was not marred by the fact that we'd already been there – in fact the canal looked surprisingly different when approached from the opposite direction, and we were delighted to spot a friendly heron on this return leg. Our journey ended where it began, and for a new cyclist like myself, I'd thoroughly recommend this as an ideal place to get started.



Shortcuts

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

After spending more than 20 years as an HGV driver, Mike Randall has swapped the open road for the open air. Mike is a waterway operative and lock keeper on the Kennet & Avon Canal at Newbury. He is responsible for general upkeep and maintenance, including checking the water levels and clearing potential blockages from all the sluices, hatches and weirs.

He used to travel thousands of miles each year 'trapped' in the cab of his lorry and says "One day I just thought to myself, 'no, I can't keep doing this, I really need a change'."

Change came in the form of a job opportunity with BW. Having owned a narrowboat for several years Mike was familiar with both the Kennet & Avon Canal and its bank staff. He was chatting to a couple of the lads when one of them mentioned some vacancies coming up.

"That was just over three years ago. I applied and got the job," he says.

Mike relishes the outdoor appeal of his work and the fact that it brings him closer to nature. A keen wildlife watcher and photographer, he knows exactly where to find creatures including deer, foxes and stoats on his patch, as well as the places where woodpeckers and owls nest. "Just yesterday I was painting my boat and this little partridge appeared behind me and started fluttering about taking a dust bath – and it was magic," he says.

The canal has obviously taken a firm hold on his life as he now lives full-time aboard his boat. "I've no regrets" he says, adding "there's nothing worse than sitting in a jam on the M25 when you want to be at home and knowing that you're going to have to spend another night sleeping in your lorry."

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Having lived on a boat for 17 years, and raising a family afloat for part of that time, Ivor Leach, waterway supervisor for the South Oxford Canal, has a unique insight into the questions and comments of his customers. Now 51 years old, he was in his twenties when he bought his first boat and that set the seal on a life-long passion for waterways.

"As a child in the 1950s my life revolved around the canal. I used to play around the Grand Union at Shrewley Common and like all naughty boys I did the usual things like build rope swings and swim in the water. I remember seeing working boats and even horse-drawn boats. It was a big part of my life."

Ivor went into the building trade, but in the 1990s when the market began to decline he needed to find an alternative. As a seasoned boater he was perfectly placed to take on a pair of charter boats (a motor and butty) for the Warwickshire Fly Boat Company at Stockton. He explains "It was wonderful for a season. I'd take the motor and my wife, and sometimes my step-daughter steered the butty and we'd take youth groups and schools out for holidays.

"I never dreamt I'd work for BW, but I heard about the vacancy for a seasonal lock keeper on the Watford Flight near Leicester. I applied, got the job and the rest, as they say, is history."

Ivor is quite certain that his own boating experience enables him to bring an informed and knowledgeable approach to his work and feels that his key role lies in liaison between the many disparate groups who use the canal.

"It's the people bit I enjoy most," he says. "Good or bad – sorting out all those complexities is the most satisfying thing at the end of the day."

JOURNEY'S END

Regional ecologist Mary Norden spends 20 hours each week commuting from her home in Suffolk to her job for BW London. "And that includes a mile and a half bike ride at the other end!" she says, adding "but it's definitely worth it."

Mary's office is on board BW's business barge 'Cowford' at Little Venice and from here she works on a wide range of environmental and ecological projects on waterways across London.

She explains "My role is really to ensure that wildlife needs are taken into account when we are involved in maintenance projects. It can be anything from a small section of bridge undergoing engineering work to a large scale, major investment initiative."

She also works on projects involving external partners like Groundwork and

local community groups. At the moment I'm working with community groups on the restoration of the River Lee at Limehouse in East London, where I'm overseeing a project to restore native species including trees and wild flowers.

"I'm also working on projects including the £1 million engineering works at Brent Reservoir – the largest SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in West London. Tonight I'm carrying out a bat survey there."

Mary explains that (depending on the species) bats generally appear about half an hour after sunset, which means that in high summer she'll be carrying out surveys from 9.30pm onwards a couple of times a week.

Mary's route to BW was via an environmental science degree and previous jobs with BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) in Colchester and five years with the Broads Authority in Norfolk. She joined BW last year. "I always thought that the environment was a really valid and interesting area," she explains, adding "I really enjoy my work for BW, I just wish sometimes that there was more of me to go round. An extra pair of hands or legs would be useful!"

SPICY PAST

In her last job, waterway supervisor Helen Clark used to end each day smelling of the nation's favourite dish – curry. She worked as the engineering manager for a spice factory and the aromatic fumes clung to her clothing.

These days she works in a (usually) fresher environment, covering a 38-mile patch on the Grand Union Canal from Braunston to Weedon and up the Leicester line of the canal from Norton Junction to Foxton.

The word 'usually' crept in there, because one of the regular battles that Helen and her team face is the problem of rubbish left in or beside the canal.

"It's one of the worst things we have to do," she grimaces. "We're often scrambling around in hedges retrieving foul-smelling bags of rubbish that people leave behind. It's something that all the lads have to do. It's not nice, but I take the view that you shouldn't ask people to do something you're not prepared to do yourself."

Helen has a degree in mechanical engineering and before working for BW she was also production supervisor for a metal packaging firm. Having enjoyed many holidays on the canals she had

already seen much of the waterway network when the opportunity to work for BW presented itself.

"I get involved in a wide range of projects and constantly meet new people. I also like getting involved in some of the engineering projects, even though my background is in mechanical and not civil engineering," she explains.

Away from work, Helen enjoys socialising, yoga, walking, reading and shopping – and a lot of her time at the moment is devoted to organising her wedding next June.

NATURAL SELECTION

Paul Wilkinson, community and environment officer for the Birmingham and Black Country Canals, is one of those lucky souls whose work is also their passion. "I've been fascinated by wildlife practically since the day I was born," he enthuses.

Paul works on a wide range of environment and conservation issues and prepares Environmental Code of Practice appraisals for regeneration, building and maintenance projects along the waterway.

"Basically I work with project officers and managers to make sure that wildlife is protected and that environmental impact is minimised when we carry out work on the canal," he explains.

Paul is currently helping to eradicate invasive species like Japanese knotweed, and on the Wyrley and Essington Canal he is dealing with problem plants such as azolla (water fern) and pennywort.

He also works on community projects with groups and volunteers, including local bird groups and the Birmingham Wildlife Trust. He has led bat walks, built otter holts and carried out a newt survey.

In post for six months now, Paul previously worked with the Forest of Mercia in Staffordshire on a community planting scheme. The Forest of Mercia is one of 12 Community Forests established nationwide in areas identified as having a low tree count.

He is finding his work with BW really satisfying and says "I've dealt with everything from dog-fouling issues to representing BW at civic meetings in Birmingham, so you could certainly say that no two days are the same!"

Letters

Please send letters to:
The Editor, *Waterfront* Magazine, British Waterways,
Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford WD17 4QA
Email: waterfront@britishwaterways.co.uk

Dear Editor

I have just read the new Trial Moorings Code with interest, but at the end I just can't believe you are serious about implementing this scheme. We don't need more regulations and codes, we are being choked with codes to the point where all the interest in boating is being dragged out of us with regulations and codes. My home base is in a marina, and yes, I pay the fee with the knowledge that I have some security in a marina whereas on the open canal no security is provided for boats, even those that have long-term moorings. What are we getting for our money when we moor on your long-term moorings? I can tell you in one word – Space.

It is simple to overcome people not using recognised long stay moorings. When a boat applies for a licence, it will have to state that it has a home mooring base or you can give it 14 days free mooring and then charge the normal rate on that stretch of water. Is this not simple?

With Regards
Mike and Dina Charlton (by email)

I'm grateful for these views on the trial moorings code and these will be considered along with the hundreds of other responses we've received to date.

However, I do want to reassure you that the Code should not have any real bearing on your boating enjoyment. Its purpose is to define what we consider to be reasonable movement of a boat when away from its home moorings. The vast majority of boaters follow the Moorings Code without even thinking about it since they don't typically want to stay in one locality for weeks on end.

For those who do not move much over a period of time when either continuously cruising or away from their home mooring, the Code is there as guidance to what we reasonably expect in keeping with our Licence Terms & Conditions.

Sally Ash, Marketing Manager, BW

Dear Editor

We have a permanent mooring at Redhill Marina on the River Soar, and often venture down to Sawley Marina which now belongs to BW. On our arrival we found all the visitors' moorings taken up with Canaltime narrowboats, so I enquired at the office to see if they could accommodate us for the night, only to be told "Not if there isn't any room on them. Why, what's the problem?". "They are full of Canaltime narrowboats," I replied. The chap shrugged his shoulders and said "Oh, not again". They have stopped the people who hire them from taking them into the marina because they cause that much damage, so the result – no overnight moorings for us. Are we going to be faced with this each weekend when we decide to visit Sawley?

Other than that I think BW do a grand job and the staff are always pleasant.

Yours gratefully
Paul Gilbey (by email)

Thank you for your letter. Unfortunately, because Sawley Marina has only 12 visitor moorings, there is always a danger that they will become occupied very quickly. However when this happens people can moor on the towpath side free of charge and access the marina via the pedestrian gate.

At Sawley there is a base for 60 Canaltime boats which effectively means ten returning and leaving each day. When they arrive at the visitor moorings, and have telephoned in, we escort them into the Marina. This is not because they may not be capable, but rather because Canaltime's insurance specifically requests that we do this. In recent weeks we have increased our Operations Team to ensure seven day coverage and this should mean that Canaltime boats spend as little time as possible on these moorings.

Rod Grant, Marina Manager, Sawley Marina

Dear Editor

With reference to the discussion concerning continuous cruisers and their overstaying at moorings. Perhaps the best way to deal with this controversy would be for British Waterways to introduce a continuous cruising licence, which would at least equal the amount of a normal licence for the length of their boat, plus the charge for the lowest class of BW mooring.

These boaters are after all continuously using the facilities and should therefore pay more. The issuing of a special licence would stop a lot of bad feeling.

Judging by the number of boaters overstaying their time on moorings on the Kennet & Avon Canal, BW do not have anywhere near enough manpower across the system to implement the proposed new mooring code.

Yours truly
Roy Chaplin, Melksham, Wilts

Mr Chaplin raises an interesting point about charging more for licences that are issued to boats without home moorings.

This was our first thought, but it really would not resolve the problem. The issue is not primarily one of revenue raising, but of fairness and ensuring that people who wish to stay in the same place do not monopolise temporary and visitor moorings designed for people who wish to navigate.

Apart from this, taking the Kennet & Avon Canal example given, a levy on a standard licence of the price of the cheapest mooring would enable continuous cruisers to moor for extended periods in locations where the market rate is far higher than the cheapest mooring charge levied.

Sally Ash, Marketing Manager, BW

Dear Editor

In this issue (Spring/Summer 2003) you've scored 20 out of 20 – that is of the 20 boat pics published EVERY ONE shows a narrowboat. Fibreglass floats too! What's more important – we represent a growing number of users who still require a magnifying glass to spot the coverage – ever thought of an annual 'Spot the Plastic' competition? At least it would give us a reason to 'thumb' your pages.

Anon

Our failure to include photographs of any plastic boats in the last issue was certainly not a deliberate omission. When choosing suitable images for use in the magazine, we select those that have the most relevance to the article concerned. However, we'll try to ensure the inclusion of a wider variety of boat types when selecting images in future.

Dear Editor

UNANNOUNCED RESTRICTIONS ON NAVIGATION

Your magazine gives much information of doubtful interest, and fails abysmally to give information that is vitally necessary for boat users, i.e. those that pay the large licence and mooring fees. In winter I get a chart of stoppages and restricted hours, but in summer – nothing. Unannounced restrictions have played havoc with my arrangements to sail my small Trentcraft Twenty boat back from Cheshire to its home base on the Chesterfield Canal, because I can only get crew for short periods and am otherwise single handed and 82 years of age.

Please make sure that all such restrictions are published in your journal so that boaters, who have to make their plans in distant places without access to local knowledge, are not let down in this distressing fashion.

Yours faithfully
Christopher Lunnon, Worksop, Notts

The stoppage document sent out to every boat licence holder each year around September time gives details of planned stoppages, which form part of our annual 'Winter Stoppages Programme'. Wherever possible, we try to carry out maintenance work during the winter, when it is less likely to cause disruption to canal users. Unfortunately, emergency/unplanned stoppages aren't predictable, and with a 200 year old network, breakdowns will always be a risk. Printing a document to send out to boaters covering the summer months would therefore be an impossible task. We maintain information on these unplanned stoppages and restrictions on our website, www.britishwaterways.co.uk, and on Canalphone, numbers for which are printed on the back of the boat licence holder and on the Boat Licence & Permit Conditions – for the north of the country call 01923 201401, and for the south call 01923 201402. It's always a good idea to check this before planning a trip. We spent £83.6 million on major repairs and renovations this year, and this is reducing the frequency of unplanned stoppages, but the programme is not complete yet.

Mr Lunnon's letter went on to give details of a number of unexpected restrictions he encountered on his trip. Unfortunately we had insufficient space on these pages to print the full letter and response, so his letter has been forwarded to the local waterway office, who will respond to him directly.

The editor reserves the right to shorten or modify any letters submitted.